

CHAPTER LXV

FIRST OPENING OF THE HIDDEN CHAPEL

I LEFT the Ssü-yeh behind to make the most of the favourable impression produced, and to urge an early loan of the promised manuscript specimens. But the priest had again become nervous and postponed their delivery in a vague way 'until later.' There was nothing for me but to wait.

All doubt, however, disappeared in the end. Late at night Chiang groped his way to my tent in silent elation with a bundle of Chinese rolls which Wang Tao-shih had just brought him in secret, carefully hidden under his flowing black robe, as the first of the promised 'specimens.' The rolls looked unmistakably old as regards writing and paper, and probably contained Buddhist canonical texts; but Chiang needed time to make sure of their character. Next morning he turned up by daybreak, and with a face expressing both triumph and amazement, reported that these fine rolls of paper contained Chinese versions of certain 'Sutras' from the Buddhist canon which the colophons declared to have been brought from India and translated by Hsüan-tsang himself. The strange chance which thus caused us to be met at the very outset by the name of my Chinese patron saint, and by what undoubtedly were early copies of his labours as a sacred translator, struck both of us as a most auspicious omen. Was it not 'T'ang-sêng' himself, so Chiang declared, who at the opportune moment had revealed the hiding-place of that manuscript hoard to an ignorant priest in order to prepare for me, his admirer and disciple from distant India, a fitting antiquarian reward on the westernmost confines of China proper?

Of Hsüan-tsang's authorship, Wang Tao-shih in his